



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCATE
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Testimony of Michelle Cruz, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
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Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

Raised House Bill No. 5428, An Act Concerning Residential Stays at Correctional Facilities

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) must oppose Raised House Bill No. 5428 as it essentially calls for the state to bear the cost a months rent with meals for an offender in a struggling economy when victims of domestic violence, who similarly cannot find housing, must resort to a homeless shelter. Many victims of domestic violence flee an abusive home and require the assistance of a domestic violence emergency shelter for their safety and the safety of their children. There are eighteen member programs across the state that provided services to more than 54,000 victims in the last fiscal year (7/1/10 - 6/30/11).¹ Of those, 1,364 adults and 1,038 children stayed in the emergency safe homes because they were in serious physical danger and had no other safe options.

During this limited six week stay at the emergency safe home, a victim of domestic violence is encouraged and expected to gain independence through employment, housing, transportation and community resources. Additionally, many victims must manage criminal court activities, family court activities and educational obligations. All the while, the victim must ensure their safety and the safety of their children. In the event that a victim is unable to gain this independence within the six week timeframe, many times the victim is forced to go to a homeless shelter, which is not conducive to the victim's safety. The idea that an inmate's plight for housing is of more concern than that of a victim of domestic violence is a slap in the face to victims.

Moreover, as the state struggles to meet its financial burdens, throughout the last four years, the OVA has been stricken with significant budget cuts. These continued reductions to the OVA's budget have had a direct impact on the OVA's ability to meet all of the demands of the office. Even though Raised House Bill No. 5428 will likely have minimal fiscal impact (last year's fiscal note projected less than \$8,100), nonetheless, the

¹ Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Domestic Violence Fact Sheet - <http://www.ctcadv.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/FACT-SHT%202010%20-2011%20for%20email%20%20.pdf>

OVA would enthusiastically welcome an increase of \$8,100, as would any of the victim service provider entities. Further, at a time when the state simply cannot afford to staff an adequate number of prosecutors to handle the criminal dockets throughout the state, it is irresponsible for the state to willingly foot the bill to house an outgoing inmate for an additional thirty days. I strongly urge the Committee to reject Raised House Bill No. 5428.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle S. Cruz

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